DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 467 204 JC 020 552

TITLE	Southeastern Community College: Catalyzing Economic Development in Rural North Carolina.
INSTITUTION	Regional Technology Strategies, Inc., Carrboro, NC.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2001-00-00
NOTE	8p.; Also developed and published by the Trans-Atlantic Technology and Training Alliance. In: Cultivating Successful Rural Economics: Benchmark Practices at Community and Technical Colleges. Regional Technology Strategies, Inc. and the Trans-Atlantic Technology and Training Alliance, 2001. p177-183.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.rtsinc.org/benchmark/cstudies.shtml.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	College Role; Community Colleges; *Community Development; *Economic Development; Economic Impact; Partnerships in Education; *Rural Development; *Rural Education; Rural Environment; *School Business Relationship; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Virginia's Southeastern Community College (SCC) examined its service area and performance in the late 1980s and found that its enrollments had dropped while area unemployment rates were rising. Local officials estimated that nearly 2,000 manufacturing jobs had been lost in the service area--Columbus County--since the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The County was also contending with low rates of high school graduation and college attendance and a high level of poverty among minority populations. To combat the region's economic decline, SCC: (1) hired a new president; (2) created, in partnership with local social services and employment offices, the One Stop JobLink Career Center; (3) developed the Small Business Center; and (4) opened the Business and Industry Skills Training Center. The College also established an employee exchange program, sending a team of Columbus County manufacturing workers to France to receive training at a Conflandey plant. At the same time, several Conflandey employees came to Columbus County and received training at SCC. Conflandey's first tonnage was manufactured out of temporary facilities on SCC's campus. Conflandey is just 1 of SCC's successful industrial recruitment strategies, all of which have resulted in 200 new jobs for the county. (NB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Rosenfeld

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 467 204

TC020552

Southeastern Community College: Catalyzing Economic Development in Rural North Carolina

Introduction

A little over a decade ago Southeastern Community College went through somewhat of an identity crisis. Until then, the school, located on North Carolina's coastal plain, had been a traditional rural community college with academics and transfer programs its primary focus. It offered a range of two-year degrees and diplomas, many relating to agricultural and service jobs, along with continuing and remedial education for those who needed it. When asked, Southeastern would provide training to local firms. Where local economic development and industrial growth were concerned, Southeastern's posture was almost entirely passive—taking part in specific tasks when requested, but never assuming a leadership role.

In the late 1980s, Southeastern's Board of Trustees began taking a hard look at its service area and performance. They saw a county whose unemployment rates were steadily creeping higher as its agricultural and manufacturing base declined, and a college whose enrollments had dropped for four consecutive years. The Trustees realized that unless the entire community recognized and attempted to solve Columbus County's needs, both the college and the county would continue to decline.

To put it bluntly, Southeastern needed students while the community needed economic and community development solutions. The Trustees decided it was time for a philosophical shift: Southeastern would depart from its passive role and become a leader for Columbus County's long-term community and economic development. It would bring together all the elements in the community necessary to create long-term strategic solutions. In this way, the college could create a role for itself in the community's advancement, opening up new avenues for bringing in students while simultaneously helping the entire community move forward and thrive.

Program Background

Founded in 1964 and serving more than 7,000 students each year, Southeastern has adopted an assertive approach to fostering growth in Columbus County. Its contributions have taken a variety of forms, ranging from continuing education programs to small business development to welfare-to-work strategies. All of these efforts have been marked by a degree of initiative, creativity, and leadership that Southeastern's partners say is the most innovative aspect of its work in Columbus County.

Southeastern's contribution starts with its commitment to adult continuing education. Like many community colleges, Southeastern has a Continuing Education Division (CED) with a wide range of educational and vocational programs to help adults prepare for and advance in the workplace. Like other North Carolina community colleges, Southeastern's CED goes beyond individual services, offering customized training and education programs for new and expanding industry in its service area. Rather than providing these services on an as-needed or by-request basis, however, Southeastern initiates recruitment efforts and takes the initiative in researching the needs of firms that are considering relocating to the area. Southeastern has made its Continuing Education Division into one of Columbus County's most important tools of industry recruitment and expansion.

Southeastern's role in the community goes beyond its training programs, however; it has also taken a strong leadership position in county-wide economic development planning. For example, it marshaled county leaders and resources to develop a comprehensive welfare-to-work plan, and it initiated and led a two-year process of developing a strategic economic development plan for Columbus County. Because of Southeastern's "proactive rather than reactive position," one partner says, "economic development planning efforts are more inclusive and have resulted

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

in greater attention being given to all population segments of the county."

Community Background

Tucked in North Carolina's southeastern pocket against the South Carolina border, Columbus County describes itself as "a tightly knit community... quietly progressive in both industry and farming." Rich in natural beauty and close to the Atlantic coast, Columbus is beginning to develop its advantages as a tourist and retirement destination. It is among the most rural of North Carolina's counties, with more than 90 percent of its 52,000 residents living in a rural setting. It faces challenges similar to those in many rural populations: limited job opportunities, low job skills, and lack of access to services and programs that can assist in overcoming these difficulties.

Columbus County is struggling with high levels of poverty and unemployment. Twenty-four percent of the county's residents live under the poverty line, and the unemployment rate has jumped in the past five years to nearly ten percent due to three textile plants closures. Textiles and agriculture have long been the basis of Columbus County's economy; now, textile jobs are declining due to automation advances and to NAFTA. Local officials estimate that since the passage of NAFTA, Columbus County has lost about 2,000 manufacturing jobs. Tobacco, which had been the county's largest cash crop, is in decline due to quota cuts following the national tobacco settlement. The service sector, however, is showing signs of slow growth.

Two other concerns have been at the forefront of Columbus County development efforts: educational attainment and the status of minorities. Columbus County is behind the state and national curves in high school graduation and college attendance; county leaders have pointed to insufficient local spending on education as a contributing cause. Community leaders are also concerned that minorities in Columbus County have significantly lower per capita income and are much likelier to live under the poverty line than the general county population. The county's economic development plan includes strategies for minority economic development, largely due to Southeastern's leadership.

Southeastern's Leadership

Balancing Leadership and Collaboration

To begin moving in its new chosen direction, Southeastern's Board brought in a new President, Dr. Steve Scott. In choosing the new president, the Board sought someone who would take a strong leadership role in charting Southeastern's new course and knew how to bring together disparate elements to forge a coalition. They chose Dr. Scott because of his background in consensus and team building, and because of his strong interest in cooperative economic development strategies. Dr. Scott's task called for a difficult balancing of taking leadership and sharing the work. He wanted to create and maintain a high profile in developing the college's new role and make the college a center of leadership for the county's economic growth. At the same time, the county's new economic development strategies had to be based on coalition and cooperation. Dr. Scott had to ensure that even as he was working to establish Southeastern as a primary economic development leader in Columbus County, he was also fostering other sources of leadership and initiative in the community.

To achieve this balance, Dr. Scott focused his role on helping people learn to work together—what he calls "cooperation 101." Since the best leadership, he says, happens when people can say of an accomplishment that they did it themselves, he worked to discover the college's and the community's untapped talents and interests. He found many people and organizations with a strong interest in and commitment to the county's economic growth, and with much to contribute to creating new long-term growth strategies. Dr. Scott identified his role, therefore, as helping all these different stakeholders articulate a common vision and direction, helping them stay motivated, and guiding the economic strategy development process from planning to implementation. To do this, he had to help the players transition from a group of stakeholders into a team.

Coping with Conflict and Turf Issues

Any community that has tried it knows that such teamwork among disparate players does not just happen. Even when all participants come to the table with goodwill and the desire to cooperate, different organizations naturally have different and sometimes conflicting interests and agendas, and turf issues still surface as organizations try to figure out how to

share ground that is usually reserved to themselves. Dr. Scott's approach to overcoming conflict was to acknowledge organizations' different interests and try to determine how these differences could be turned into an advantage for the team. It would be not only unrealistic but wrong, he says, to try to deny turf issues or conflicting agendas or simply tell people they had to put them aside; organizations' interests are based on long-standing commitments to particular goals and strategies, and they cannot be expected to simply shelve them.

Rather, these particular interests should be viewed as one of the valuable contributions that the organization brings to the table, and as the key to determining what that organization can add to the economic development strategy process. Southeastern's role thus became to find out what organizations' interests were, what they wanted and needed, and then to show them how that need could be filled through a strategic partnership with the other players. By showing people and organizations what was in it for them, Dr. Scott and Southeastern showed them how the community's resources could be leveraged toward goals that were bigger and more ambitious than anything that one organization could achieve alone.

In the process, Southeastern created many strategic community partnerships, acting as a facilitator to bring far-flung organizations to the same table. Examples include its creation of the Minority Development Council, which includes government, nonprofit, business, and religious leaders; its collaboration with local Committees of 100 and Chambers of Commerce for growth strategy planning; its work with local utilities and business leaders to establish the infrastructure needed for two new industrial parks; and its partnership with local economic development authorities for industrial recruitment and retention strategies. One partnership in particular exemplifies the lessons about conflict and turf issues described above—the One Stop JobLink Career Center.

Example of Strategic Partnership: The One Stop Office

Columbus County's One Stop JobLink Career Center was created in 1989 through an alliance among Southeastern, the Columbus County Department of Social Services (DSS), and the local Employment Security Commission (ESC) office. All three organizations had an interest in job placement and in the design of the new program, but they also had some conflicting needs. The first problem that arose was that of trying to use a common application for job placement services—DSS in particular had specific requirements for its applications that were difficult to amend. Rather than get stuck on that obstacle, the partners set the issue aside and searched for common ground, seeking to make the most of their differing interests and capacities.

They found that the areas of greatest common interest were between Southeastern and ESC. ESC wanted to be able to deliver job placement services to students in the most effective way, but didn't have the resources to create new outreach programs just for students. Southeastern wanted its students to have access to job information and career services help, but didn't want to be in the job placement business itself. Southeastern thus offered ESC two days a week of office space on campus, where ESC would come and do job placement for students. In 1990, Southeastern allocated additional funds toward the partnership, and extended ESC's office to five days a week. DSS resources were brought in by using former DSS recipients as job coaches. Turf issues were thus skirted by allowing each organization to contribute what it had and get what it needed, without anyone's trying to provide a service that another organization already provided. The partners also realized that collaboration does not necessarily have to extend to every facet of an organization's operation. Realizing that trying to create a common application was likely to be a sticking point, the partners did not insist that the application had to be part of the alliance. They sought other ways to collaborate that leveraged the resources and served the needs of each organization.

The JobLink Center now provides workforce training and services to welfare recipients as part of Columbus County's welfare-to-work plan. The Center also provides remedial education and workforce services to all county residents, regardless of income status. The JobLink Center received the 1997 U.S. Department of Labor's Workforce Development Award for an Exemplary Program in One-Stop Career Service.

Continuing Education Programs

While Southeastern always offered continuing education classes, it was only after the 1988 shift in institutional philosophy and strategy that the Continuing Education Division became an important part of Columbus County's economic development

efforts. Through Continuing Education, Southeastern initiated partnerships with the Columbus County Economic Development Commission, the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the North Carolina Community College System, and other state and local entities with economic development goals. These partnerships have facilitated several new programs, described below, within the Continuing Education Division that illustrate Southeastern's commitment to community economic development.

Small Business Center

Founded in 1986 with funding through the North Carolina Community College System, the Center's mission is to provide training, education, and support to the owners (or potential owners) and employees of small businesses. The Center is home to several of Continuing Education's most successful initiatives, including the Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning (REAL) program, which gives hands-on training to adult students and the Business Development Center, a small business incubator housing several small entrepreneurial enterprises and one venture capital company. The Small Business Center also provides a resource library, information dissemination, and career counseling and referral services. Since opening, the Center has served more than 800 clients with one-on-one counseling, technical assistance, and other services, and has held nearly 600 seminars and training workshops with total attendance of nearly 12,000.

The Center houses the Microenterprise Loan Program, one of the programs of which Southeastern is proud because it fills a true market gap. When assessing local small business needs, the Southeastern staff noted that most small business centers teach people how to open and run a small business, but don't always take the next step of helping them get access to capital. Southeastern decided that their Small Business Center had to help people get their businesses up and running. They hired a former microenterprise loan officer to design and maintain a new capital access program, which offers revolving loans for microenterprise start-ups and expansions.

Most recently, the Small Business Center became a pilot demonstration site for the national Assets for Independent Demonstration program. This program offers Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), matched savings accounts that help people build their own assets and financial literacy training and financial counseling.

The Columbus County Strategic Plan

Southeastern is one of 24 community colleges in the U.S. selected by MDC, Inc. to participate in the Rural Community College Initiative, a project funded by the Ford Foundation, whose goal is to strengthen community colleges' ability to contribute to their communities. Southeastern received three grants over five years totaling $170,000. Southeastern used these funds to lead efforts to plan and begin implementing the Columbus County Strategic Plan for 1998–2007.

The planning process was a lengthy one that required a great deal of careful preparation to make sure that it was inclusive, comprehensive, and produced a meaningful working document of which the whole county would take ownership. The Southeastern staff who led the process decided early on that they did not want to replicate the process used ten years earlier to create the county's previous Strategic Plan. That Plan was developed by a small group of business and government officials with little input or even awareness from the rest of the county; as a result, it was difficult to get buy-in on the Plan's goals and strategies.

Southeastern thus decided that this Plan should be developed through a "bottom-up" process—it included representatives from local industry, education, and government, but it also incorporated input from every group in Columbus County that wanted to be involved. For a full year, the Plan developers heard from minority leaders, social service providers, local farmers, health providers, and dozens of other groups, in addition to receiving input from economic development planners and industry leaders. It took a great deal of work to synthesize the needs and concerns of all these groups, but it paid off in the end: because all of these groups had been involved in the creation of the Strategic Plan, they were supportive of the final product and were eager to participate in implementation. As Dr. Scott points out, it would have taken much more work to try to create that level of buy-in if a Plan had been completed with limited input.

The Plan addresses a wide range of goals and objectives under three categories: Educational Access, Economic Development, and Quality of Life. Under Educational Access, the Plan points out low levels of educational attainment in Columbus County: 40 percent of the adult population has no high school credential, the county's students score below the state average on SAT tests and end-of-grade proficiency tests, and only 40 precent of the county's graduating high school seniors go on to two-year or four-year

higher education. The Plan points out that some of these low scoring indicators may be due to Columbus County's below-average levels of education spending.

The Plan provides a strategy for addressing these issues through increased grant funding, academic intervention programs, and more active marketing of higher education opportunities, among other strategies. Southeastern has begun implementing these strategies through a partnership with local industry to do outreach and career awareness-building in the county high schools. Local firms provide internships, career mentoring, and some financial help with tuition at Southeastern. In addition, the college has begun expanding its distance learning options, to make post-secondary education more feasible for those farther away from campus. Southeastern has also become a pilot site for the new North Carolina Manufacturing Certification program. By offering a standardized credential that any manufacturer will recognize, this program demonstrates to potential students the immediate value and relevance of post-secondary training and education. To date, 100 students have received their state-approved Manufacturing Certificate.

Under Economic Development, the Plan notes high unemployment levels, high poverty rates, and deficiencies in utility and transportation infrastructures. The Plan outlines strategies for securing an interstate highway, bringing water and sewer to all county residents, and creating new jobs by promoting small business start-ups and developing the capacity of the county's industrial parks. Implementation of these strategies is well underway: Southeastern created programs through its Small Business Center (including the REAL entrepreneurship learning program, a Microenterprise Loan Program, and an IDA program) to promote small business start-ups. Southeastern also led the drive to install water, sewer, and natural gas at the county's industrial parks, helping to attract new tenants. Four out of five of the county's water districts are now on the public water system, with the fifth to be added soon, and the county is progressing toward bringing sewer service to all the districts.

Under Quality of Life, the Plan describes strategies for increasing the county's cultural and recreational opportunities—which would also aid in economic development by promoting tourism as an economic opportunity in Columbus County—and for expanding the county's public transportation system. Southeastern has assisted in the development of a van system of public transportation that is run by a local entrepreneur, and is developing partnerships with local government to expand this system.

Two concerns that overlap among the Economic Development and Quality of Life categories, and which Southeastern's leadership has helped to bring to the front of Columbus County's planning process, are deficiencies in labor force work readiness skills and the status of minorities. Columbus County employers have cited concerns about attendance, punctuality, productivity, and general work ethic among their employees. These work force deficiencies, community leaders feel, contribute to Columbus County's unemployment rate and hold back the county's economic advancement. The Plan includes strategies for integrating work readiness skills into the secondary school and community college curricula, and Southeastern has already incorporated many of these employability elements into its adult education and industry training programs.

The status of Columbus County's minorities, particularly African Americans, is another area of concern that Southeastern's leadership has helped to highlight. Minority students score disproportionately low on end-of-grade testing, and are a disproportionately low percentage of Southeastern's student body. Minorities are also more likely to live in poverty in Columbus County, and are much less likely to own their own business. The Plan contains strategies aimed at helping minority students improve their educational attainment and increasing the number of minority students taking classes and receiving services at Southeastern.

The college has hired a minority recruiter to work in the county's high schools and to develop other recruitment strategies, and has appointed a minority affairs advisor to help develop and maintain the college's partnerships with Columbus County's minority leaders. Southeastern started the Minority Economic Development Council, which is now its own entity independent of Southeastern, and also held its first Martin Luther King Day celebration, which is now an annual event. The celebration, Dr. Scott explains, helps to send the message that all of Columbus County's citizens must be included in the community's efforts to develop and grow.

Business and Industry Skills Training Center

The College's Business and Industry Skills Training Center opened in 1988 with two purposes: to help existing business and industry to increase productivity through continuing education and training and

to attract and retain new business and industry through focused training programs and other services. The Center researches the needs of relocating firms through contacts with the state Department of Commerce, and contacts the firm early in the decision-making process with a customized package of relocation support services. These services include workforce training, assistance to the firm's relocating staff, and technical support during construction.

These services enable the Center to balance two sometimes competing economic development strategies: attracting new industry, and promoting the success of existing industry. While every area wants to attract new firms, providing incentives and tax breaks can become a very costly undertaking and a zero-sum game. As Dr. Scott notes, "success leaves footprints." He states that Columbus County does a good job of helping its industry to thrive and succeed, that success is apparent to firms that are considering relocating to Columbus County. All the things that Southeastern does for new firms and continues to do after they're established, therefore, can serve both as ways of attracting industry and as ways of supporting existing industry.

A case in point is Conflandey, a steel wire manufacturing group headquartered in France. In 1998, Conflandey was looking for a site for its first American location. Its representatives visited 44 counties in several states. When they came to North Carolina, Southeastern contacted the Department of Commerce and promised that if the Conflandey representatives visited Columbus County, they would be impressed. When the representatives arrived, Southeastern's staff had already developed a customized training plan for Conflandey's work force, and showed the representatives where their new location in the industrial park would be—right next to Southeastern's campus. The Conflandey representatives, who today recall how impressed they were with the preparation, teamwork, and commitment they saw, soon settled on Columbus County for its new plant location.

Southeastern's efforts to support Conflandey did not end there, however. When the plant manager arrived to supervise construction of the new facility, Southeastern staff helped him to find a house, established him in an office on the Southeastern campus, and furnished all his communication and administrative needs. The college also established an employee exchange program, sending a team of Columbus County manufacturing workers to France to receive training at a Conflandey plant. At the same time, several Conflandey employees came to Columbus County and received training at Southeastern. Finally, Conflandey's first tonnage was manufactured out of temporary facilities on Southeastern's campus—as the plant manager likes to say, Conflandey's American operation was actually "born" at Southeastern. Today, Conflandey still considers Southeastern's staff and facilities one of its most valuable resources, and the most important reason to stay in Columbus County.

Conflandey is perhaps the most striking example of Southeastern's successful industrial recruitment strategies, but not the only one. The industrial park currently has four tenants and one graduate, all international companies attracted to the area at least partly through Southeastern's efforts. For all of these companies, Southeastern has provided extensive support during the planning and plant development stages, recruitment and training for the firms' new employees, and ongoing skills upgrading and general consulting. These firms' combined investment is over $30 million, and they have created nearly 200 new jobs for Columbus County.

Strengths/Challenges/Replicability Issues

Southeastern's primary economics development strengths are its drive and leadership in the community. The college takes the initiative to identify Columbus County's most pressing needs and find creative, innovative ways to address them. At the same time, it involves many community partners, tapping the talents and resources of other county leaders. One partner notes that Southeastern has made economic development planning efforts more inclusive, ensuring that all population segments of the county receive equal attention. The college's ability to develop and establish a vision for change, while still sharing responsibility and credit, make it a constructive and powerful instrument of economic growth.

This example of leadership can serve as a model for other community colleges that want to be force for change in their communities. "Simply put," says a local economic development leader, " Southeastern Community College is a vital asset to our county's economic growth, and it has demonstrated its aggressive, creative leadership by the successful results it has produced."

The role played by Dr. Scott in transforming the college from a passive participant to an active leader in county economic development has been crucial. Yet it is difficult to sustain, let alone replicate,

achievements that rely on the vision and personal leadership of one person. Fortunately, however, at Southeastern this is not the case. Dr. Scott left Southeastern in 1999 to become the vice president of the North Carolina Community College System—and Southeastern continues to be a leader in Columbus County's economic development. In fact, it is a testament to the team-based leadership that has been created at Southeastern that when speaking today of how Southeastern evolved into its present leadership role, the staff at Southeastern primarily credit Dr. Scott while Dr. Scott credits the staff. It appears that both contributed to Southeastern's achievements—that while Dr. Scott helped to articulate a common vision of Columbus County's future, it was a vision embraced by the Southeastern staff and other county leaders, and one that they continue to pursue.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

This document is Federally-funded, *or* carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").